

**Non-significant, Site-specific Amendment to the Forest Plan  
Eagle Creek Area Decision Memo  
Visual Quality Objectives  
Shoshone National Forest**

**Background**

This amendment has been prepared because a minor change to a Forest Plan standard and guideline needs to be made in order to implement the Eagle Creek Area project (FSM 1922.5). This amendment is non-significant (*see* discussion below) and applies only to the Eagle Creek analysis/project area. This amendment applies only for the implementation of this decision and does not apply to future projects in this area.

As noted in the Decision Memo, my decision requires a site-specific amendment for exceeding an Adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) of partial retention<sup>1</sup> for management areas 2B and 3A. Because of the insect epidemic and extensive acres of dead and dying trees, existing visual condition is currently declining. The amendment relates to the 2B management area direction listed on page III-125 and the 3A direction on page III-133 of the Forest Plan: *“Do not exceed an Adopted Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of partial retention”* and Forest Plan general direction on page-25: *“Meet the visual quality objectives of retention and partial retention one full growing season after completion of a project.”*

I decided to proceed with the Eagle Creek Area Hazardous Fuels Reduction for two reasons. First, the acreages involved represent only a small percentage of the approximate 4,982 acres of the project area; this fuel reduction project will create contrasts from mechanical and burning treatments in the short-term. It will not have a significant effect on visual quality in the long-term. Mechanical treatments in the foreground view will create the highest contrast reducing the scenic integrity. Within approximately 10 to 20 years after these treatments, visual enhancement is anticipated with forest regeneration and increased diversity.

Second, the fuels reduction plan for the area is designed to provide a strategic fuels reduction and defensible space for enhanced fire suppression capabilities throughout the area. Not removing the insect-killed and infested conifers to reduce fuels would compromise the purpose and need for the project, greatly lowering its effectiveness and the desired enhanced fire suppression capabilities.

In considering trade-offs, the long-term benefits of reducing the risk of a large, high intensity wildfire that would remove much more of the forest cover and threaten resource values, properties, tourism, human health and safety overrides exceeding the visual quality objectives on the relatively small acreage (393 acres or about 7.8% of the project area). Likewise, 1,002 acres for prescribed burning (20%) is worth the long-term benefit of reducing the risk of a large wildfire that would remove much more of the forest cover and threaten resource values, properties, tourism and human health and safety.

Forest Plan management area direction for the majority of the project area emphasizes rural and roaded natural recreation opportunities (2B) and semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation in roaded and unroaded areas (3A) and maintaining/enhancing visual diversity. While this direction emphasizes visual resources, I decided that hazardous fuels reduction need to take precedence in the Eagle Creek project area, based on the risk of wildfire to developments, tourism, resources and human health and safety. My decision to

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<sup>1</sup> Partial retention-Human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape, but must, at the same time, follow naturally established form, line, color, and texture. It should remain visually subordinate when viewed in foreground or middle ground.

complete a non-significant, site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan is based on the wildland-urban interface and hazardous fuels situation and the need for management actions.

The mechanical treatments would exceed the VQO of partial retention for a longer period than one growing season after project implementation. Within the project area, long-term, visual diversity and forest health of vegetation will be improved, the short-term (<10 years) effect is minimal and necessary and is not irreversible. The long-term benefits of hazard fuels reduction outweigh the short-term effects.

Over the long-term, Forest Plan goals and direction relating to visual diversity and forest health would be improved.

## **Significance**

The remainder of this amendment evaluates factors in assessing the significance of this amendment (FSH 1909.12 (5.32)):

### **Timing**

This action takes place during the planning period. The current Forest Plan is scheduled to be revised within the next four years. This amendment will cause no significant change in the plan over the remainder of the planning period.

### **Location and Size**

The planning area for this action is about 4,982 acres and the actual effect of mechanical treatments for hazardous fuels reduction will occur on approximately 393 acres. This area is insignificant in relationship to the 2.4 million acres covered by the Forest Plan. This amendment will have negligible effect on the Forest Plan.

### **Goals, Objectives, and Outputs**

This change is small in relationship to the projections made in the Forest Plan. The change does not significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected in the Forest Plan.

### **Management Prescriptions**

This change does not apply to future actions. This change does not alter the desired future condition for the project area, nor does it change the anticipated outputs.

## **Conclusion**

Based upon the evaluation of the above factors this amendment is not a significant change to the Forest Plan.

Appropriate public notification has been made as per 16 USC 1604 (f) (4). Scoping occurred in the spring of 2003. Project status was maintained on the Forest's SOPA list and public Internet site. The need to reduce fuels in the wildland-urban interface should take precedence, based on the risk of high intensity wildland fire. In the short-term, VQOs would be exceeded to enhance long-term visual quality and sustainability of desired vegetation conditions in the area.

/s/ Rebecca Aus                      January 22, 2004

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